scattered teardrops

By: rumiberri

...where I call out your name, but it doesn't matter, because you're no longer here. [Set after series finale][Maybe Rebellion later][One-shot for now]

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She touches down, black heels landing softly against cracked concrete. The wings on her back flutter once more, before folding in and disappearing into magical dust.

Kyouko rolls her eyes; she always feels like Homura is showing off every time she takes flight.

Mami greets her with a polite smile. "Welcome back, Akemi-san." She holds out her hand. "Here is your share from today."

Homura accepts the black cubes into her open palm. She doesn't bother counting them, and merely slips them into her skirt pocket.

"Thank you," she murmurs. "Are we done for tonight?"

Kyuubey appears and scampers up Mami's leg. He winds around her back, and finally, his white body is resting over her shoulder. "I don't sense anymore active wraiths around the city."

Homura nods, and with a bright flash, she's in her school uniform as her magical outfit fades away. "If there's nothing else, I will take my leave. Good night."

Mami barely manages to echo a soft 'goodnight' in response, but Homura fails to notice. She's already moving, the soles of her loafers hitting the ground as she makes her way out of the seedier districts in the city.

It's past midnight, and her thoughts are fixated on a hot shower, and maybe something to eat, if she still feels like it once she returns home.

City lights blink in the distance, a constant companion as she walks the empty streets.

She's halfway there when she finally stops and turns around.

There's footsteps, and it takes a moment until whoever has been trailing after her, appears under the street lamp right at the corner.

Kyouko.

Homura watches as she jogs lightly to catch up; she's a bit out of breath once she stops in front of her.

"Geez, you walk fast for someone who has sticks for legs," Kyouko grumbles.

"Did you need something?"

Kyouko shrugs.

A full minute passes as Homura stares, waiting.

Kyouko remains silent—unusual for her—and finally, Homura turns back around to continue on her way home.

She's walking under another dimmed street lamp, when she hears the tapping of sneakers echoing her own.

Rather than call her out, Homura keeps on walking, Kyouko trailing after like a quiet shadow.

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Her hand flips the switch, and the lights in her living room flicker on.

"Still empty as ever," Kyouko comments as she pushes past her.

Homura merely shuts the door, sliding the safety chain onto the latch after she enables the lock.

A small sigh, before she turns around.

A set of chairs, arranged in circles in the middle of the living room.

Walls, filled with projection screens as they cycle through pictures and collected information.

Candlesticks lining the sides, and finally, a large hologram of a golden pendulum swinging back and forth.

She closes her eyes, and takes in a deep breath. A slow exhale, and when her eyes open again, everything disappears.

Her living room is bare. There are no chairs, no screens. Those white walls are undecorated, and the only thing here, is her school bag that she had left on the floor when she had dropped by earlier.

She can hear rustling from the kitchen, and she turns just as Kyouko steps into view, one hand holding a familiar looking bowl.

"Hey, mind if I eat this?"

Homura moves to retrieve her bag. "That's fine," she replies when she feels Kyouko watching her. "You know where things are."

"Yeah. Thanks."

Now gripping her school bag, Homura heads towards her room to take that long awaited shower.

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Her hair is slightly damp as she leaves the bathroom, now dressed in loose pajamas, ones she had purchased recently on a whim.

A towel around her shoulders and body still warm from the scalding temperatures, she makes her way to the kitchen for a cup of water.

As she passes through the living room, she finds Kyouko lying on the floor, a projection screen positioned above her. The sound is turned down, and she can hear the faint murmurs from whatever show she's watching.

She pauses in her steps. "...The shower is open. I would wait a bit before taking one though. I used up all the hot water."

"Uh huh." Kyouko waves a hand in acknowledgement. "There's extra water in the kettle, but you took your sweet time, so it's probably warm by now."

"I see. Thank you." Homura turns and continues on her way to the kitchen.

One cup of water later, her bare feet take her across the living room once more.

"I am heading to bed now," she tells Kyouko. "Don't forget to turn off the lights. The extra blankets are in the closet."

"Yeah."

"Goodnight."

She moves quietly, feet padding softly against the tiled floor. Just as she's about to disappear into the hallway, Kyouko calls out to her.

"Hey, Homura."

She turns, and finds Kyouko still lying down, eyes still glued on the screen. "Yes?"

"Tomorrow, you busy?"

Homura regards her curiously. "Other than our patrol in the evening, not in particular. I do have some homework I need to finish though."

"In the morning... just for a few hours, come with me for a bit."

It's an invitation out of the blue. Homura stares at Kyouko, but she's still there, still concentrated on the screen.

She takes a moment, until she finally answers. "...Alright."

"Cool. Thanks."

"...If that's all, I'm going to sleep."

"Yeah, goodnight."

Rather than ask her where they're going, Homura merely pushes down her curiosity and heads to her room.

The door is open, but she stands there, ears straining. She can barely make out the sounds from the living room.

She shakes her head, before she finally steps inside.

The door closes, and the noises fade away.

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Like always, her eyes open as she bites back a sob.

Her fingers grip at the blankets, heart beating loudly as she struggles to control her fear.

Whispers leave her lips as she tries to reassure herself that things are okay, that it was a nightmare.

That things are different now.

Her eyes slowly adjust to the moonlight streaming in from her bedroom window. Once she's able to see, she sits up.

She turns, hands reaching for the table by her bed.

Reaching, for those familiar ribbons.

She gathers the soft fabric around her fingers and pulls it close to her chest.

Her eyes close, and the tears that appear, slowly trail down her cheeks.

"Madoka..."

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When she emerges from her bedroom, she's not surprised to find light peeking in through the hallway. More often than not, Kyouko ends up falling asleep without turning them off.

It's one of her habits that Mami dislikes, and sometimes, when they patrol and they're following after Homura, they argue about it rather heatedly.

A quick trip to the bathroom, before Homura heads to the living room.

She's expecting a sleeping Kyouko, but instead sees her sitting up, red soul gem in her hand.

Kyouko looks over, eyebrow raised. "You still awake?"

"The same can be said of you."

Kyouko shrugs. "Couldn't sleep. You?"

"Same."

Kyouko nods. The ring returns to her finger. "Good timing, I was just about to boil some water." She rises to her feet, movements sluggish and not like her usual self. "You want some?"

She knows she's not going to be able to fall back asleep, and nods. "Yes, thank you."

Kyouko makes her way to the kitchen, and she follows after her.

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She's leaning against the counters, Kyouko seated at the small foldaway table she has set up in the middle of the room. There's a metal kettle atop the stove, the heated coils slowly bringing the water inside to a boil.

Two opened cups of instant ramen are in front of Kyouko, along with a stack of disposable chopsticks nearby.

The first time Kyouko had visited and raided her kitchen, she had been disgusted by how empty it was.

The ramen isn't even hers, they're leftovers from the last time Kyouko had visited.

Kyouko turns to her. "Hey."

Homura looks up.

"You're..." Kyouko shakes her head. "Nah. Nevermind..."

They fall back into silence, remaining that way until a sharp whistle breaks the muted atmosphere.

Homura moves, but Kyouko beats her to the punch, her calloused fingers turning the knob with ease.

The kettle is lifted, and Homura watches as the liquid is poured into the waiting containers, wisps of white steam rising from the spout.

Once that's done, the kettle returns to the stove with a light clank, and chopsticks are placed on top of the lids as the noodles steep.

Homura finally straightens up and takes a seat across from Kyouko.

One cup is pushed her way.

"Thank you," she murmurs.

"Uh huh."

They wait a few minutes, and when Homura sees Kyouko reaching for the chopsticks, she does the same.

The wrapper is pulled off, and there's two snaps as they break the utensils apart.

The lid is removed, drops of condensation threatening to spill as wafts of steam escape.

A soft 'itadakimasu,' before Homura uses her chopsticks to stir the noodles around.

There's no words exchanged between the two of them, just the sounds as they eat their simple meal.

Kyouko finishes the noodles first, and Homura is chewing as she watches her tilt the cup back to drink the soup.

She smacks her lips in satisfaction, and the empty container is lowered onto the table, chopsticks placed on top.

"Pretty good. I should buy more," Kyouko says as she looks over to the cabinets. "Actually, *you* should buy more food. What do you even eat most of the time?"

Homura shrugs. "Ready made bentous mostly. Frozen food. Calorie mate."

Kyouko shakes her head. "That stuff isn't good for you."

The irony of her words has Homura staring, and Kyouko shrugs.

"That's what Mami always says. You should have dinner with us sometime, you should at least have one good meal a week."

Homura merely continues eating, and Kyouko stands.

"Hey, can I have one of your frozen meals?"

Homura sips at her soup. "That's fine, help yourself."

Usually, Kyouko is more of an 'act first, questions later,' type of person, and Homura finds her current behavior rather uncharacteristic.

Months ago, she would've been struggling to understand why.

Now though, she merely ignores it.

Things are no longer predictable, and if she ends up thinking about it, whatever sanity she is still holding onto will chip away even quicker than the current rate it's disappearing at.

She concentrates on her meal, ignoring how Kyouko's shoulders are hunched, and how her back suddenly seems weighed down.

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"Hey. Homura. Homura!"

Hands are shaking her awake, and one lavender eye blearily cracks open.

A familiar redhead looking at her, and her eye closes.

"Hey, wake up! You said you were coming with me, remember?"

More shaking, and suddenly it stops.

The blankets are pulled off, and she automatically curls her legs in.

"Wake up! Sheesh, you're not a morning person, are you?"

Her hand rubs at her forehead, and finally her eyes open, only to squint against the light from the window.

"...What time is it?" she whispers.

"8."

"...Wake me up in two hours." She closes her eyes.

"Nope! Wake up, now! Seriously, I'm going to throw water on you if you don't get up!"

"..."

She feels the bed move, and hears Kyouko's footsteps as she strides across the room.

Homura sighs, and though her head protests, she sits up.

When Kyouko returns with a cup of water in her hands, Homura narrows her eyes.

"You awake?" Kyouko asks.

"Yes..."

Kyouko hands her the cup. "Here, have some water."

She's slightly suspicious, but drinks it anyways.

"Nice pajamas, by the way," Kyouko comments as she takes a seat on the bed. "Didn't know you liked cats." She yawns.

Homura glances down at the prints on the fabric. She shrugs, before she finishes the rest of the water.

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A quick breakfast after they drop by the convenience store.

Homura is chewing her onigiri thoughtfully; it had been paid for by Kyouko.

"It's a special occasion," she had told her. "Don't get used to it."

The last bit of rice is popped into her mouth, and as she licks her fingers clean, she glances around the streets, looking for visible clues to this 'occasion.'

It's early morning, not yet 9, and they're making their way over to Mitakihara Mall.

Sunday, and the streets are fairly empty.

When they arrive, she hears Kyouko curse loudly: the mall doesn't open until 10.

"Argh, I forgot." Kyouko runs a hand through her messy bangs. Her head tilts up, and she sighs. "Alright, change of plans. We'll go downtown. I think the smaller shops open earlier."

Homura remains silent, and before she follows after Kyouko, she looks to the glass doors.

She skims the posters, but there's nothing special on them.

Her feet move as she finally starts trailing after her.

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The first shop they enter is a toy store, and there's a soft chime as they step inside.

The lone attendant at the counter bows with a friendly 'irrashaimase' said in greeting.

Kyouko ignores her, and Homura at least has enough manners to return a bow.

They browse through the aisles, wandering. Kyouko is looking for something, but she's unsatisfied with what she sees.

Finally, as they are about to leave empty handed, she spots a small bear plush on one of the side shelves.

To Homura, it looks like any other stuffed animal, but something about it speaks to Kyouko, and not a minute later, she's bringing it up to the registers to make her purchase.

Again, Kyouko pulls out crumpled bills from her pockets.

The transaction is complete, and they exit as the chime rings twice.

A small plastic bag in Kyouko's hand, and Homura follows as she continues down the street.

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They pass different boutique stores, and Homura notices how Kyouko keeps her eyes plastered to anything but the glass windows as they walk by.

She understands.

Sometimes, the lavender she glimpses in her reflections aren't ones that she recognizes, either.

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With a shake of her head, Kyouko turns around.

She's muttering something under her breath as she retraces her steps.

As she passes by, Homura can't help but stare.

It's only when she sees Kyouko entering the flower shop nearby, that she finally moves to join her.

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Unlike the other stores, there are more customers in here, mostly female.

They're standing in front of the gift section, and Homura is curious enough that she steps closer to see what they're browsing for.

She reads the words off a nearby card, and blinks in response.

It answers some things, but not why she's here.

She looks around, and Kyouko is no longer within the vicinity.

She continues further into the store, and as she passes small bins of individually cut flowers, she pauses as something catches her eye.

There's hesitation as she lifts her hand. Her hand drops, and she walks away.

A moment later, she doubles back. She searches for the best in the bunch, before making her way to the register.

Kyouko is paying for a bouquet when she spots Homura standing in line.

"Just one?" Kyouko asks when she joins her, hands crinkling the cellophane wrapped around the flowers.

Homura twirls the lone pink rose in her fingers; the thorns have already been trimmed off.

She glances down, the familiar colour making her eyes burn and her chest pull.

"Yes," she answers.

Kyouko shrugs, and they leave.

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They're heading towards 2nd street, when Kyouko suddenly veers left, and they enter another convenience store.

She grabs a basket, and Homura follows her to the snack section.

She's expecting pocky and chips and whatever else Kyouko likes to eat, but instead she's shoving these little boxes with toys in them into the container.

The entire section is emptied out, and the only thing that makes sense to Homura is when Kyouko finally adds a box of pocky into the mix.

At the register, Kyouko comes up short.

"Argh, I thought I'd have enough," she grumbles.

She's staring at her potential purchases, wondering which to remove, when a cellphone is slid in front of the scanner with a small beep.

"It's a special occasion," Homura replies at her surprised look, "don't get used to it."

Kyouko glances away. "...Thanks."

Rose still held in her fingers, Homura nods. "You're welcome."

When they're in front of the bus stop, Kyouko shoves half the boxes in her direction. "Help me open them."

Homura glances down to the flower, and with nowhere else to put it, she slips it behind her ear, the pink pressing close against the red of her ribbon.

They manage to have everything separated by the time the bus arrives, and as they board, the trashcan is at least half filled with discarded boxes.

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They take a seat in the back, and she closes her eyes as they head towards their destination.

It's unfamiliar scenery surrounding them, and she would rather not look.

Kyouko remains quiet as she sits next to her, though she can hear rustling as she's shifting through the items from the store.

It takes almost 30 minutes until they arrive, and somehow she manages to fall asleep during that time.

Kyouko is shaking her awake and then pulling her up from the seat.

Her eyes suddenly open as she feels the flower falling, and Kyouko steps back in surprise.

She catches it before it slips, and Kyouko finally recovers to pull her with her as they exit the open door.

The bus drives away with a hydraulic hiss and a brief sputter.

They stand there for a moment, Kyouko's eyes distant as she takes in the area around them.

Kazamino.

Her hometown.

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The sidewalk starts off smooth and paved, signs of upkeep, of frequent repairs and frequent use.

Slowly, cracks appear, and cement turns into dirt and a path less traveled.

She recognizes this, though the Kyouko in front of her doesn't know that.

Steps light as she follows, Kyouko leads them to a dilapidated church in the middle of a place that has seen better days.

Overgrown weeds, and rubble where there should be walls.

Broken glass, and scattered wood.

Rather than head through the entrance where a crumbling doorway still stands, Kyouko walks around, sneakers imprinting zigzag patterns into dirt.

She has never been to the back, but she has an inkling to what lies ahead.

More emptiness behind the church.

A lonely, flattened field.

Empty—except for three slabs of uneven concrete.

Kyouko stops, and she stops with her.

The flowers shift in her hand, and plastic seems to echo in their ears.

"Tadaima," Kyouko whispers.

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She watches as Kyouko approaches those markers. She's standing off to the side, feeling entirely out of place.

She doesn't know why she's here.

Kyouko crouches, and those toys they had separated are slowly pulled out, one by one, and placed next to the smallest marker to the side.

"Hey, Momo. I got you something." Kyouko lines them up in rows, little figurines of small cats in different poses. "You had a keychain, with this cat, remember? They're doing another promotion, this time with other colours. And," she digs out the bear, placing it in front of the line of toys, "this thing seemed cute. It reminded me of you for some reason."

Kyouko bows her head, and Homura can see her hands are clasped in front of her.

She whispers something that Homura can't hear, and then she moves over to the next marker.

The bouquet of flowers is gently lowered to the ground.

"Okaa-san. Sorry, I didn't drop by for Mother's day. I know they're not your favourite, but those aren't in season right now. I'll...stop by again, when they bloom. Sorry."

Another silent prayer said, before Kyouko sits back against her heels.

She doesn't move from her spot, but Homura can see her head is tilted and she's looking to the last and final marker.

Kyouko suddenly turns to her. "Hey, Homura. Come here."

Her fingers gently press into the flower still tucked in her hair, and she slowly walks over.

She stands behind her, waiting.

"This is my friend, Homura," Kyouko says softly. "She's like me and Mami, a magical girl. The three of us, we're protecting Mitakihara. Kazamino's kind of smaller, you know... so I don't really need to be here that often..."

Kyouko's gaze is absent, staring, but not actually looking at what's sitting in front of her.

She stands, hands brushing down those faded shorts of hers.

The plastic bag is lifted, and she's walking away as it swings gently against her side.

Homura follows like a silent shadow trailing after.

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Inside the church, it's dusty and quiet.

Light filters in through the cracked stained windows, an array of colours dancing across the surfaces.

Kyouko leads her up the long set of stairs, shoes tapping and wood creaking. When they reach the top, she takes a seat.

Homura settles in next to her, and there's the sound as plastic rustles, followed by a jagged sound of cardboard being torn open.

A stick placed between her teeth, before Kyouko offers the box to Homura.

She takes one, and they crunch down into chocolate and cookie, light crumbs dropping and disappearing like specks of dust amongst the ruins.

Kyouko leans back, hands resting behind her. She exhales slowly, head tilted up as her eyes stare into the broken rafters above.

"You're probably wondering why I'm here," Kyouko finally says.

Her voice bounces off the walls, a hollow sound that seems as empty as her words.

Homura shrugs. "It's a special occasion."

Kyouko throws her a humorless smirk. "Yeah." Her eyes close.

Homura knows she's waiting for something, but she's never been good at understanding people, even after all this time.

She draws her legs in, bringing them close to her chest as she rests her chin on her knees.

Being in here, reminds her ever so vaguely of her lifetime in Tokyo. Her eyes stare at the spots of colours superimposed on the floor.

"I didn't even buy him anything." Kyouko laughs suddenly, the sound sharp and a rattle in their ears. "I'm not even sure what he would like... I can't even remember, what did I give him before...?"

She isn't expecting a response, and Homura doesn't give her one.

"Flowers for moms," Kyouko says as she holds out her hand, "that's a given. But, dads..." Kyouko turns, and stares past the broken glass to outside. "What do you get someone like that...?"

Kyouko sighs.

"Geez... I'm an idiot. I-I'm not even sure why I came here. What was I expecting... He's not going to be here. No one's here," she whispers.

Homura shifts, uncomfortable with her sudden admission. She wonders why Kyouko hadn't asked Mami along instead.

Her hand reaches for the ribbon in her hair, and her fingers accidentally knocks into the rose still tucked behind her ear.

This time, she's not quick enough, and it falls.

She grasps for it desperately, and like everything else she touches, it slips through her fingers.

She shoots up from her seat, shoe snagging on a broken splinter of wood. She feels herself falling as the flower tumbles through the cracks.

Eyes still watching, she doesn't bother trying to save herself, but there's a pull against her jacket, and she's suddenly thrown back.

"What the hell are you doing!"

Kyouko.

A sigh escapes her mouth, and she sits up.

She can feel that glare on her, but she ignores it, eyes concentrated as she searches for pink down below.

Kyouko stares at her for a moment as she continues her attempts, before she holds out her hand. "Come on, I'll show you how to get down there."

Homura blinks. Finally, she looks up. "...Thank you."

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They find it, dust coating the sides and dirt speckled on petals.

She cradles it gently, a soft apology unsaid on her lips.

Something about her expression makes Kyouko nervous. She follows her impulse, and pats Homura on the shoulder.

"It's just a little dirty. I'm sure you can wash it off," Kyouko tells her.

The rose remains in Homura's palm as they walk back to the entrance.

Kyouko stands there in front, hands in her pockets as the plastic bag filled with duplicate figurines hangs her from wrist. She's peering through the broken stained glass windows, face withdrawn, and eyes haunted.

"You believe in God, Homura?"

She's trying to brush away the stains, and her fingers pause. "Yes," she responds.

But not the same one you do, she whispers in her mind.

"Yeah?" Kyouko tilts her head up.

Against the blue summer skies, the ruined church that towers above, cuts a harsh, jagged line.

One hand touches that red ribbon in her hair once more. "Yes."

Kyouko turns to her. "You think God will forgive me?"

Her voice is quiet, and not at all like the Kyouko she's used to.

They stare at each other, Kyouko looking almost desperate.

"...Are you sure it's forgiveness from God that you seek?" Homura asks her finally.

Kyouko steps back, flinching at her words. She turns her head, and the spell is broken. "What do you mean?"

Homura places her attention back to the rose. "You came here for a reason. Today is a special occasion, is it not?"

Kyouko does not answer.

She brushes her fingertips against soft petals and closes her eyes. "Someone once told me, that our very existence is a sin. To exist, and to be granted miracles that even God would never have provided for us... But," her eyes open to find Kyouko staring, "that's implying that miracles are free, but haven't we all paid our price for our wishes?"

She lifts her hand, and tucks that rose back into her hair.

"Whether or not 'God' forgives us, maybe it doesn't matter."

Kyouko's lips part, words on the tip of her tongue, but the lavender that stares at her suddenly seems so much older.

"Maybe, in the end, what really matters is that you forgive yourself."

Kyouko draws in a sharp breath. "You think, my dad, will ever forgive me...?" Her voice cracks.

"I think," Homura tells her as she turns away, "the question is whether or not you will allow yourself to let him forgive you. Sometimes, we deliberately cling to our ghosts, afraid to move on without them."

She knows this all too well.

Homura moves closer towards the windows, and beckons Kyouko over.

There's a large piece of glass at their height, and Homura points to it. "What do you see, when you stand here?"

Kyouko's arms are to her sides, and Homura notices how her hands tremble.

She remains standing in place, unable to step any closer.

"What do you see?" Kyouko asks her suddenly.

A small smile plays across Homura's lips as her fingers trail along the painted glass.

"Nothing," she tells her, eyes glossing over her unfamiliar reflection. "I see nothing at all."

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The trip back is just as quiet as the trip there.

When they step onto the familiar streets of Mitakihara once more, Homura remains by the bus stop.

She knows their errand is over, and watches as Kyouko stands awkwardly to her side.

"I'm... going to head home now, if you're done."

Kyouko nods. "Yeah. Thanks."

She starts walking away.

"Homura."

Her footsteps pause, and she turns around.

"You too," Kyouko says softly.

At Homura's puzzled expression, she clarifies.

"You, should forgive yourself too."

Homura does not respond, and instead continues on her way.

Her hand reaches up, fingers brushing against the pink rose in her hair.

There's a gentle breeze blowing, and she sees red fluttering out of the corner of her eye.

As long as these ribbons are still with her, she'd never be able to forgive herself.

Another thing that she knows, all too wel**l.**

AN: Happy belated Father's day! Where I write a story about Kyouko, but really, it's about Homura.